

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3376

INFO AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I JNL BANGKOK 8102

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: NLA REJECTION OF DR. PUAI UNGPHAKON'S REFERENDUM

1. THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) REJECTED DR. PUAI UNGPHAKON'S DRAFT BILL TO AMEND THE 1972 INTERIM CONSTITUTION AND ALLOW A PUBLIC REFERENDUM ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. ALTHOUGH PUAI HAD EARLIER COLLECTED ABOUT 70 SIGNATURES FROM FELLOW LEGISLATORS TO A PETITION WHICH PLACED THE BILL ON THE NLA AGENDA, PUAI'S MOTION GATHERED ONLY 54 SUPPORTERS AND 74 OPPONENTS IN A MAY 17 VOTE. THE ASSEMBLY DEBATE FOCUSED ON THE LEGALITY OF AMENDING THE 1972 CONSTITUTION RATHER THAN ON THE MERITS OF THE REFERENDUM. NLA SPEAKER KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S POSITION THAT PUAI'S BILL WAS NOT OF PROPER CONCERN TO THE NLA DREW HEATED RESPONSES.

2. DR. SOMSAK CHUTO, RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION AND NLA MEMBER, TOLD US MAY 14 THAT, ALTHOUGH HE SUPPORTED PUAI, HE DID NOT THINK THE BILL WOULD PASS. HE SAID THAT MOST NLA MEMBERS WERE UNCERTAIN WHETHER THE LEGISLATURE HAD THE AUTHORITY TO AMEND THE 1972 CONSTITUTION, SINCE THERE WERE NO SPECIFIC AMENDMENT PROCEDURES WRITTEN INTO THAT DOCUMENT. HE POINTED OUT THAT THESE UNCERTAINTIES HAD DEFEATED MARUT
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BUNNAK'S BILL MAY 7 TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION AND ALLOW

REPEATED INTERPELLATION OF MINISTERS.

3. PUIAI PARTICIPATED IN A PANEL DISCUSSION AT CHULALONGKON UNIVERSITY MAY 16 WITH FELLOW NLA MEMBERS DR. KAMON SOMWICHIAN AND BUNCHANA ATTHAKON, DR. THAWAT WICHAITIT, AND JOURNALIST SOEMSI EKKACHI. DESPITE SOEMSI'S OPPOSITION QAKCOS STUDENT AUDIENCE OBVIOUSLY FAVORED THE PUIAI REFERENDUM. PUIAI ARGUED THAT WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF STUDENT VOLUNTEERS, THE REFERENDUM COULD BE HELD INEXPENSIVELY. HE CONTINUED THAT THE REFERENDUM WOULD NOT SERIOUSLY DISTURB THE ELECTION SCHEDULE. HE OFFERED CONSTITUTION PROMULGATION IN DECEMBER AND ELECTIONS IN FEBRUARY 1975. HE CONCLUDED WITH AN APPEAL FOR STUDENTS TO SUPPORT HIS DRAFT BILL IF THE LEGISLATURE DID NOT PASS IT.

4. COMMENT: IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR WHY PUIAI IS SO INTENT ON PRESSING HIS REFERENDUM. HE HAS RECEIVED LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT EXCEPT FROM SOME STUDENTS. MANY IN THE NLA OPPOSED PUIAI BECAUSE THEY OBJECT TO ANY FURTHER DELAYS IN PROMULGATING THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION AND HOLDING ELECTIONS. PUIAI MAY BE TRYING TO BUILD A RALLYING ISSUE FOR FUTURE POLITICAL PURPOSES, BUT THE REFERENDUM ISSUE IS DEAD.
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